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"FOR A NATION OF NEIGHBORS"

NEW WAYS WITH YOUTH

A PROPOSAL FOR WORK WITH

TEENAGE GANGS

IN THE "NEW NEWARK"

March 4, 1959

Member, National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Houses

Member, Welfare Federation of Essex County

TERMINAL REPORT

DETACHED WORKER PROGRAM

FEBRUARY, 1960

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This report marks the conclusion of a four-year demonstration of the Street Club Worker as a valid and functional technique in work with difficult youth. Since the contents herein supplement previous reports of the Worker, emphasis will be placed on the findings of the demonstration rather than the specific occurrences during the demonstration period.

With the complete sympathy and full support of the Turrell Fund, the Fuld Neighborhood House undertook the program in 1955, at a time when violent gang activity was at its height. This was also the time that the Reverend Hayes Homes had recently opened, bringing 1,450 new families into the area.

Four years of work with the youth of the area has resulted in specific findings available for future work with such groups. Four years of community life in process has changed the character of the neighborhood and in turn, the substance of the youth peer society.

One factor can be described as the most potent force in the process of the Detached Worker process. The warm, friendly, firm and consistent relationship that the Worker uses to full advantage gives the clue to changes that might take place with youth. Such a sincere relationship, reaching the depths of the boys emotions (such depth as they will permit), opens the door to horizons heretofore unknown to these boys, a world which now has just a bit of a glow to it as a result of this experience.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin A. Livenstein
Executive Director

THE DETACHED YOUTH WORKER

THE SYMPTOM

Within the Central Ward of Newark, as exists in other similar areas in the city, there were several organized teen-age "gangs" who found the streets of Newark to be their playground and recreational center. These groups, varying in their patterns of "play", had basic characteristics which label them as "anti-social groups". In this Ward, and others, they roamed the area and aroused anxiety and fear among parents, residents, teachers, merchants, police officers and other individuals and groups. The articles appearing in the Newark Evening News during 1957, though somewhat glamorized, gave ample evidence of the terrible dangers involved in ignoring this threat to a community's healthy growth.

The Fuld Neighborhood House, in cooperation with the Turrell Fund has had a "Detached Worker", on staff for the past several years. The "Detached Worker", through his contacts with the boys in several gangs and other groups in the area, was able to accumulate material which describes the boys actions as symptomatic of deeper problems. The Youth Board of New York made these findings in their past ten years experience. Roaming in groups, molesting children and women, establishing "territories" and "boundaries", fighting, "bopping", "taking over" luncheonettes, grocery stores, dope addiction, pimping, sexual perversions, - all are indication of the needs of these boys. In other areas of the city, inter-racial and inter-religious tensions have been added to already existing problems. Basically, the destructive actions of the boys are reactions to the problems that they face in their every day lives.

THE BASIC PROBLEM

Contained herein is a summary of what has been found through the Detached Worker demonstration to be at the base of "gang" behavior. This material is supported by additional evidence available from the New York City Youth Board.

1. Uprooted, bewildered and frightened people thrown together without preparation for participation in an organized society.

2. Selective service taking leaders and models from the community, leaving immaturity.
3. Economic deprivation wreaking havoc with families.
4. Teenagers, already facing the problems of growing up, needing security, a healthy group life, and understanding, gentle and firm adults to guide them. Instead they find weakness, lack of identification and low standards. The "muscle" is the standard and the "gang" is the security.
5. Teenagers need recognition of their ability to grow up and think and act independently so as to feel their own worth in society. The immediate recognition, and many times the only source of recognition, is obtained from bizarre, anti-social acts, designed to arouse the attention of all.
6. Family problems, separations, divorces and general instability in the home drive teenagers into groups of their own where rigid and well-defined standards provide emotional security. In several instances, the group standards are anti-social and members merely follow.
7. A hopelessness pervades the atmosphere of the "gang", the feeling being - what's the use, no one will give us a chance. In several instances, where chance has been given, hope and some happiness have grown.
8. Public and private agencies located downtown where the teenagers and parents fear to tread, reluctant to move out into the wider, hostile world. These agencies are needed in and around the immediate area.

The problem could be defined and substantiated in much greater detail if resources were available for a broad research program related to the question, "What factors directly affect gang formation?".

THE TECHNIQUE

The main approach of the Detached Worker was that of the street club worker, a technique started and developed by the New York City Youth Board. It has had more success than any other method yet devised. The technique has often been described: A young, but mature, trained worker is assigned to make contact with a known group; he "hangs" out at the corner store where the members congregate, and slowly, usually in three to six months, he comes to be accepted as a friendly outsider who is willing and able to help them. Experience in New York and elsewhere indicates that these workers gain acceptance by more than 80% of the gangs contacted. The

worker concentrates on getting to know the leaders intimately and helps them with their personal problems. As he gains the gang's confidence, it becomes possible for him to organize athletic sessions, dances and other social affairs, and group outings, such as weekend trips to the country. The worker must plan carefully in order to minimize the possibility of conflicts with other groups, but these activities are important because they open new vistas to the boys who generally know little of the world outside their own "turf".

Most gangs remain structurally intact whether they are socialized or go "bopping". In the latter case, a gang may at times be weakened by attrition of membership through detentions, arrests, narcotic addiction, severe injuries or deaths, while remaining members are apt to reform ranks and either recruit new members or join with another "bopping" gang. The group that is socially reformed continues its activities as a unit, whether in its own club rooms or in a community agency's quarters. In the main, the street club worker helps the member of the group to which he is assigned to achieve a degree of psychological maturity - the desire for the discipline needed to train for and hold a job, to develop steady and relatively honorable relations with a girl, to become identified with the normal community. This usually takes time; meanwhile, the job is to hold the line against violence and anti-social activity. Vigilance and firm action by the police is essential during this period, so that "bopping" involves the gang in a kind of double jeopardy at the hands of other gangs and the police too. When maturation takes place, the gang ceases to be meaningful and disintegrates.

When street club workers have brought their gangs along to an adequate degree of socialization, meeting rooms and other facilities should be provided. In the earlier stages of work with fighting gangs, the boys feel such sharp hostility toward adult-sponsored activity that they will not accept the limitations necessary in normal community facilities; they cannot be mixed with non-gang boys and girls. On the other hand, the Youth Board has found that two or more gangs can satisfactorily share quarters, under supervision of trained workers and by councils representative of the gangs.

SUPPLEMENTAL HELP

The street club worker often needs to call upon other trained workers and special services to help individual members of the gangs with their problems. The New York experience indicates that most gang members are inadequate boys and girls, who join gangs because they cannot achieve success in a normal society, and they simply lack the ability to seek help on their own, to leave their own "turf", to get medical attention or counselling services, or to look for jobs. It has been a weakness long recognized by the Youth Board that casework, psychiatric and job placement services have seldom been available to their street club

workers in the locality in which they operate. The project will be in a position to provide these auxiliary services right in the neighborhood.

"Project Hayes Homes", presently being undertaken by the Council of Social Agencies, could provide the partial family, casework and psychiatric help. New York, Philadelphia and Detroit have all become involved in this type of service.

TWO PROCESSES

Club X --- Predestined for Failure

Club X was the most fearsome group in the area at the time the program was started. Composed of about 50 boys ranging in age from 15 - 19, this group literally terrorized the neighborhood and the House.

Several instances were reported where the members of Club X had entered the House, taken over the pool room, run the halls, striking girls and others in their way. Adults had to be escorted out via the rear door. In the neighborhood, Club X was known to be involved in theft, assault, dope addiction, and acts of violence and passion. Most of the members of this group were already chronic delinquents and pathological liars. Many times limits had been set with members only to be broken by the members.

The Detached Worker attempted to establish a relationship with this group in the streets. Such attempts were scoffed at and openly resisted by the group. In some individual instances, a beginning relationship seemed to exist. However, the violent, anti-social nature of their activity continued to the point where Fuld House expelled eight leaders of the group permanently.

Ultimately, most of this group were apprehended in one crime or another by the police. Several were sent to State detention homes. The remaining group, expelled from the House, and generally rejected by the community, disintegrated into individual activity.

Club Y --- A Success Story

At the same time that work was started with Club X, the worker had established contact with the leaders of Club Y, another violently active gang in the neighborhood. The purpose of this second relationship was to control the "rumbling" occurring between X and Y.

The pattern of this relationship gave evidence that the leadership of Y was receptive to the worker's approach. Informal contacts were started in the streets and maintained there on a regular basis. As members of Club Y met with difficulties, were they personal, legal, or social, the

worker was interested and available though always interpreting his helping and firm role.

Gradually, Club Y began looking forward to the worker's contact. The relationship deepened and new activities cropped up. Football and baseball practices were conceived and held. Visits to the House were planned and successful in purpose --- gradually having Club Y accept social limits of the House, using the activities as an incentive.

After two years, the Club Y members were offered bona fide membership in the House, which they accepted. Slow, consistent and firm progress was made as the boys sponsored dances, planned trips, discussed House policies and staff attitudes. This effort culminated in two ways:

1. Group Behavior: Club Y, though having occasional recurrence of the old pattern, but never as violent, became an accepted group in the House and in the neighborhood. Several of the members form the nucleus of the House basketball team. Comments from other community centers visited by the team continually support the boys in their new channel of recognition. Behavior and activities in and out of the House support this.
2. Individual Growth: Several of the members of Club Y have continually volunteered to help with clerical and other jobs in the House. Every member of the club now holds a steady job. Discussions among the boys now involve talk of "going their own ways" because they have grown up.

ANALYSIS OF TWO CLUBS

Failure for the Average Group Work Agency and Street Club Worker

In the case of Club X, the effort of the House was, as described above, predestined to fail. As noted, many of the members were chronic delinquents, and in some instances, psychopathic. In any event, the club had a "sick" characteristic --- that is, their activity was not only anti-social. The members of the club were in and of themselves as individuals, retiring, depressed and vicious. They were consistently hostile and destructive, with no indication of any self-control evident to the staff of the House.

In their actions in the House, it was obvious that Club X was not prepared to accept any form of limits because they could not. Their pattern of behavior had been set and rooted deeply. Testing of this deep rooted problem took place in many instances on the part of staff.

In the attempts at relationship on the part of the worker, this club was continually suspicious and rejecting in their reaction to the friendly overtures. Such consistent rejection of help indicates a lack of feeling of need for help, despite the fact that the help is obviously needed.

The Success Story

In the case of Club Y, success in some degree could be anticipated by the gradual movement of the boys into a relationship with the worker. Later a willingness to try some of the worker's ideas indicated that youthful minds were still open to suggestion and learning.

The next step, acceptance of limits by the group, had its storms, but the diminution of intensity of such storms indicated growth once more. The final step was obvious to behold.

Club Y now became interested and intent on setting a new pattern for themselves -- they termed it "a good reputation". Dances, trips, ball games were planned with the sole intent of showing people that the Y Club was a topnotch social club. This process is still in motion.

However, a new and anticipated stage has started at the same time. With all members holding jobs, they have equivalently become independent citizens, beholding only to themselves. This has not yet become apparent to the whole club, but has been expressed in a variety of ways.

Meanwhile, Out on the Streets ---- the Future

On the streets of the Central Ward, the "gang" has disappeared for now. The tension of the 1955-56 period is gone and the neighborhood has a stabilized characteristic about it. The protective function of the "gang" has diminished considerably, until one can see only youth. However, this form of youth group in the area has existed for years without the "glamour" and "headline" attention of the "gang". And it is with this form which Fuld Neighborhood House and other group work agencies can have their greatest success.

The Fuld House staff is aware of about forty unorganized friendship groups of teenagers in the area. The House has succeeded in attracting about 15 such friendship clubs, averaging memberships of about 15 per club.

The friendship club is a group of natural friends who stay together for most of their after-school and social activity. They plan activities spontaneously or informally. Inevitably in their conversations, someone mentions "Let's form a club".

In this area, such groups or unorganized clubs do not know as yet, where they can turn for help with this very natural teenage developmental problem. Yet it is among these groups that Fuld House and other agencies

can draw out the potential leadership, the positive activity, the support and community service that teenagers naturally possess.

These unorganized friendship clubs need help and guidance in learning how to participate in the organized adult world. And, since the world demands this of them, shouldn't there be help available so that they can meet this demand.

YOUTH HAS TAUGHT US

The two processes noted above have been extremely valuable in teaching the House of new ways with youth. The insight derived from these experiences have provided opportunity for the growth of other youngsters with less pain and greater productivity.

At this point it might be wise to summarize the conclusion drawn from the Detached Worker demonstration.

Regarding the Youth

1. Youth groups can be characterized in a number of ways other than social and anti-social. Within these two broad classifications there are additional classifications, the use of which would be extremely helpful for agencies and workers.

This item above would provide substance for a research project.
2. Just as there are chronic criminals, so there are groups with chronic criminal activity. In the judgment of the writer, it would be invalid for a group work agency to work at length with such groups. It would be wiser to attempt "required group therapy" because of their activity and behavior patterns. The word "required" can be enforced only as a result of court referral, thus its use.
3. Just as youth test the limits set by the adult society, so the youth agency can test the ability to accept limits on the part of youth groups. The acceptance of limits is a necessary and vital adjunct to growth and maturity. Group workers have the opportunity constantly to test the reaction of groups to limits in order to determine the group's readiness for growth.
4. Those groups normally labelled "anti-social" must be approached earlier in their lifetime -- and these groups do have a lifetime averaging about five years. The negative set pattern must

not be allowed to grow into late adolescence lest it become the adult pattern.

5. As determined by the New York City Youth Board, it is vital to have the confidence of and work with the natural leadership of these groups -- and any other groups.

Regarding the Worker

1. The worker must be sound of mind and body, particularly as regards his own picture of the value of limits and the "acceptable" patterns of society. In his work, he is continually operating around limits and acceptance.
2. The worker must have intimate knowledge of the age group characteristics lest he confuse normal teenage behavior for "anti-social" behavior.
3. The worker must have the ability to accept relationships with a variety of other people, including other workers in social welfare who do not value the Detached Worker program.
4. The worker must be prepared to discuss, in detail and in emotional depth, the values of the limits and acceptable mores he proposes.
5. An intimate knowledge of processes is an absolute necessity for the worker, or in the case of the untrained worker for the supervisor. There are specific periods of time when the group process gives indication of growth and development and where full advantage must be taken of the situation in order to affect change.
6. The Worker should be attached to some bona fide agency in the area so that the groups will have an object with which to identify. This object later becomes a set of values with which to identify.
7. Regular records should be kept of all meetings and contacts with groups. It is on the basis of the record that process can be best evaluated. These records need not be detailed accounts, but surely can and should be summaries of important developments. This is known as selective recording.
8. The Worker should attempt to work with two groups at a time. This differs from the usual format of one gang per worker, but in the writer's opinion, provides a more realistic balance for group members.
9. The Worker must inform all staff members of important points in process so that all House staff can provide a consistent

approach for the group. This is vital since any breach of consistency will be viewed as an incisive weakness.

As Regards the House

1. Constant interpretation to the community and general public is an absolute necessity.
2. The House must choose its specific function in working with the groups and limit itself to that function. The intensive therapy function with groups must be relegated to the therapeutic agencies, which are best suited to handle this sort of situation.
3. The support and enthusiasm of the Board of Trustees in behalf of this project provided a sound foundation for its positive affects.

As Regards the General Community

1. This demonstration indicates the value of working with the youth of the streets, not only in their anti-social groupings, but more so in their natural, unorganized groups. This development takes place at the junior high school level, and in ~~few~~ instances, a bit earlier.
2. Teenage group life is a natural growth characteristic which must be encouraged and channeled for the general good.

IN CONCLUSION

The four year demonstration has ended. Recommendations have been made to both the Council of Social Agencies and the Mayor's Commission on Youth of the City of Newark. The Essex County Park Commission has been most helpful in continuing this work through the Summer Work Camp program of 1957-1958. Their budget no longer permits the Work Camp program to be subsidized from that source. Thus the work of Fuld House in relation to the youth of the streets continues.

Public officials must soon realize the importance and value of such demonstrations in terms of community dollars. Here people should weigh the cost of one year at Jamesburg or Annandale for one offender as compared with one year's salary for one worker handling 25-50 youth. The Street Worker is far more reasonable -- not cheaper, but reasonable.

To the Turrell Fund, the Board of Trustees and the staff of Fuld Neighborhood House should go a bouquet for their sincere and devoted effort to bring the voice of youth from beneath the blanket of gloom

To the members of the street groups still searching for the shelter of the guiding hand, we all bequeath our lives.